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Fowl Deeds

—BY—

JENNY WREN



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FOWL DEEDS

A NEGRO COMEDY

By JENNY WREN

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Sambo Jeremiah Gittem—A purloiner of chickens.

Maw—Sambo's wife and accomplice.

Florence Nightingale Gittem—Student daughter of Sambo.

Abraham Lincoln Gittem }
George Washington Gittem } Sons of Sambo

Rev. U. R. Longwind—A colored preacher

Rastus—Suitor to Florence Nightingale

Aunt Chloe—A neighbor

Mr. Vincent—A white man

Time—The Present.

Place—The home of Sambo, and a negro church.

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FOWL DEEDS

ACT I.

Stage Setting—Humble negro home. Darkey mother in tatters, red handkerchief on head; crooning baby; house topsy-turvy; George Washington, 12, and Abraham Lincoln, 13, having a pillow fight. Table, chairs and a couch. Poor furniture.

Mother—Dar, dar, now, chillen, that'll do; I can't never git dis here Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane ter sleep wid all dat noise.

Abraham Lincoln—Well, ma, I ain't doin' it. It's George Washington. (*Flings pillow at George.*)

George—(*picking up pillow; throws it at Abraham, then another.*) No, ma, 'tain't me neither. Abraham Lincoln, he knocked mah brains out first.

Maw—Knocked your brains out! Neither one of you ain't got no brains. You jist like your paw. (*G. W. throws another pillow. Maw reaches to corner for stick*) Git out o' heah, git to bed. Lawsy me! Florence Nightingale gits home from her yeah at de mission school on de mornin' train. She'll think you boys am a lot o' hood-lums. Git, now!

G. W.—Say, maw, did you know Abraham Lincoln fell into the water today?

Maw—(*looking A. L. up and down*) Lawsy, me! Abraham Lincoln! What for did you fall into de watah? Did you git out again?

A. L.—Did I git out again? No, maw, I'm in dere yet. (*All laugh.*)

Maw—Git to bed, ya scallawag! What fo was you at de watah?

A. L.—What fo' was I at de watah? We weren't doin' nothin'. We'se jist sittin' by de ribber, a-drinkin' it all in.

Maw—Yo' lazy good fer nothin's, git to bed. I ain't got no wood; so yo' got to git up in de mornin' and chop down dat elm. G'wan now!

G. W.—Chop down dat tree! Why maw! If we chops down dat tree, we jist have to chop it up. (*Lahgh*)

A. L.—Aw, maw. We don't need to chop down no wood, dere's a hundred sticks a-layin' roun' our back door.

Maw—Abraham Lincoln! Dere you go exageratin' again. Haven't I tol' ye 40,000 times dat ye mustn't exagerate like dat? Now, gwan to bed. (*Boys make faces at each other, turn a handspring and scamper off.*) Don't fergit ter say yo' prayers! Lawsy, me! (*Setting down stick. Baby cries.*) Now, Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane; don't you git te fussin' now. (*Rocks crying child, who gets quiet. Sits down on rocker, and sings darky lullaby. After song she lays baby down on pillow on floor.*)

Maw—Lawsy, me! Nine o'clock, and paw ain't home yit! Lawsy, me! Guess he'll hab a good chicken fer Florence Nightingale's dinner, tomorrer. Guess ah'd better git his supper ready. (*Hurries around.*) Lawsy, me! If ah do say it, Sambo am good at gittin' chickens, praise de Lawd! (*Sets old broken dishes on dirty, bare table; pulls hair out of butter, and pulls it through mouth.*) Lawsy, me! (*Puts cream pitcher to mouth and tastes cream, makes face, spits on floor, sets cream on table, cuts bread, spills it on floor, picks it up and places it on table.*) Lawsy me! Sambo am late. (*Turns to sleeping babe.*) Ah declare! Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane, ye won't know yer sister when she comes, she'll be that blooming stuck up. Ah never did want ter send her to dat mission school, but yer paw, he was so dead stuck on it, ah couldn't do nothin'; but Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane, if she comes home thinkin' she's better than you an' me, we'll show her. (*Noise is heard outside door. Knocking. Maw*

opens door and admits Sambo carrying a living chicken under each arm, grinning. Maw continues.) Lawsy me! Deary me! Two ob 'em, Sambo! You shuah will be git-tin' catched soon.

Sambo—Neber mind, honey. Ah knows bettern dat. De good Lawd protects his own. (Puts chicken, whose legs are tied, on table.)

Maw—Bless de Lawd! (Pets chickens.) Florence Nightingale will hab one good dinner. (Noise is heard outside. Man's voice calls "Whoa" to horse. Knock on door. Sambo and Maw look scared.) Sambo, you hide quick! (Sambo crawls under couch. Maw puts chickens on floor; stands over them, hiding them with her skirts. Another loud knock. A. L. and G. W. come scampering out from bedroom.) Come in. (A. L. opens door.)

A. L.—Come in, Mr. Vincent.

(Enter Mr. Vincent, a middle-aged white man, whip in hand, looking stern and searchingly around the room.)

Maw—Howdy, Mr. Vincent. How am you all? Have a chair.

Mr. V.—(sterling) No! I've just lost some more of my chickens and my dogs trailedd the scent this way. You haven't seen anything of them, have you?

Maw—No, indeed. ah haven't seed a chicken fer many a week. None eber comes dis way.

Mr. V.—Where's Sambo?

Maw—I don't know. He ain't to home. But if we eber heah ob de man what took your chickens, we'll shuah let yo' know. (She has trouble hiding the chickens while speaking.)

Mr. V.—If ever I catch him, I'll sure knock his brains out.

(A. L. snickers, and puts hand over mouth.)

Mr. V.—(turning suddenly to boys.) Abraham Lincoln, where's your father?

(Boys look at each other, scared.)

G. W.—He's—he's sick. (Mother puts up hand in warning.)

Mr. V.—Sick? What's the matter with him?

A. L.—Ah—ah—guess—it's chicken pox.

(*Sambo wriggles trying to get farther under couch.*
G. W. snickers again.)

Maw—George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, go to bed this minute. You're too rude.

(*Boys only grin.*)

Mr. V.—(turning to *Maw* angrily) I thought you said Sambo wasn't home.

Maw—Ah—ah—said he wasn't here. Meanin', ob course, dat he wasn't in dis room, an' knowin' he wasn't able to come. Lawsy me! He's jist sufferin' terrible dis minute. Ah oughter be puttin' a hot poultice on his heart.

Mr. V.—Well, you tell him to keep a sharp lookout for that nigger who stole my chickens.

Maw—Dat I will, sir.

(*Mr. V. turns to go.*)

A. L.—Say Mr. Vincent do you keep many chickens?

Mr. V.—(shouting) Keep many chickens! No, I should say I do not. But I try to. (Exit.)

(*A. L. and G. W. shout with glee, turn a handspring, then rush to Maw, pulling out a chicken each from under her skirts, hold them aloft and dance around the room, laughing.* *Sambo crawls out, grinning.*)

Maw—Lawsy me! Dat was a close one. Dat chile almost gib you away.

Sambo—He said he'd knock mah brains out. Ha, ha, ha! What would ah be doin' then?

A. L.—He couldn't knock any brains out ob you, could he paw?

Maw—He shuah couldn't. (All laugh.)

(*Steps are heard again outside door. Door opens.* Boys each hold their chicken behind them. *Maw rushes to front of couch, spreading out her apron, while Sambo*

hurriedly crawls beneath couch. Mr. V. again enters and looks around suspiciously.)

Mr. V.—I just wanted to ask you to be sure to tell the man who took my chickens that he'll get his brains knocked out.

Maw—We sure will tell him, Mr. Vincent, if we eber sees him.

G. W.—But, Mr. Vincent, do you think you can knock any brains out of him? (*Both boys snicker.*)

Mr. V.—I'll show him. (*Turns and goes out.*)

G. W.—(*calls*) Ah'll help yer lick him.

(Sambo crawls out. Maw takes chickens. Sambo bends over to tie shoe, and G. W. hits him—a tin pan in pants making much noise.)

Sambo—Ouch! Gwan to bed, or yer won't git no chicken tomorrer.

Maw—(*busy untying the legs of one chicken, while other chicken flops around the room.*) Lawsy me! Gwan now, chillen. (*A. L. grabs G. W. by the ear, and they scamper off quarreling.*) Ye'd better say yer prayers agin. (*A. L. comes back.*)

A. L.—Say, paw, Ah wants a monkey dreadful bad. Won't you gib me a quartah ter buy one?

Sambo—What? Gib yo' a quartah to buy a monkey? Wal Ah reckon we got a monkey in our family already.

A. L.—Who's de monkey, Paw?

Sambo—Why, you're de monkey, ob course.

A. L.—Den, paw, if Ah'm de monkey, won't you gib me some money ter buy peanuts for de monkey?

Sambo—Peanuts, nothin'! (*Picks up stick threateningly. Git ter ned.* (*A. L. turns handspring and moves off.*) Wall maw, ah reckon de good Lawd has been good to us.

Maw—Ah don't like dat there Mr. Vincent. He give me sich a nasty look.

Sambo—Ha, ha, ha! Ah no, Maw. Mr. Vincent didn't gib you dat nasty look—yo've allays had it.

Maw—Lawsy me! Sambo Jeremiah Jones! (Picks up a chicken as if to throw it at *Sambo*, who rushes out, chased by maw.)

CURTAIN

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ACT II.

Stage Setting—Negro church. *Rev. Longwind* in clerical robes addresses his congregation of colored people. The negro cast make up the congregation.

Rev. Longwind—Now, bredren, let us open our meetin' wid a good ole niggah song. (Use any convenient negro melody.) All rise will ye. (Preacher beats time and all sing, *G. W.* occasionally drawing out a line after others have finished.) Be seated please. (Takes off glasses.) Now, bredren, I hope you all have been good Baptists dis week. Yo' know de good book meant us all to be Baptists. I can prove dat. Fo' you know it talks much of John de Baptist, but neber does de good book mention John de Mefodist, or John de Congregationalist. So I charge you bredren, to obey de word, and be good Baptists. (Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane cries. *Maw* gets up to take her out.) Heah, sister Gittem, neber mind takin' dat baby out; she's not disturbin' me.

Maw—(turning at door.) No, maybe she's not disturbin' you; but you're a disturbin' her. (Goes out.)

Rev.—Now, bredren, ah want yo' all to hab a good, clean conscience. Yo' know de Lawd kills some men wid guilty consciences. Just last week ah read of a man who swallowed a lot ob gold paint, and de Lawd killed him. An' do you know what de doctor said caused his death?

Sambo—No, massa, what id de doctor say caused his death after eatin' gold paint?

Rev.—Well, after he'd eaten de gold paint an' was dead, de doctor said he died of a consciousness of inward

guilt. Dat, bredren, consciousness ob inward guilt, means a guilty conscience. Now, yo' see de results ob a bad conscience, and yo' can't hab a bad conscience unless you've bin transgressin'. (Pauses.) Now, bredren, dis am an experience meetin', an' ah want yo' all to say what is on your mind.

Sambo—(rising) Massa preacher Ah was to de country las' week, an' ah saw a man ah tinks we oughta pray fer. Ah know now why de milk we gits am so poor.

Rev.—Why, Sambo, am de milk we gits so poor?

Sambo—De milk we git am poor 'cause he watered his cows jist before he milked 'em.

Rev.—(shaking head solemnly.) Watered his cows jist before he milked dem? Wal, Mr. Gittem, what was dat man's name? We certainly must place him before de Lawd. No wonder our milk am blue.

Sambo—George Drinkwater was his name.

Rev.—George Drinkwater. Ah will indeed pray for him. Anybody else wish to speak?

(*Maw* enters carrying sleeping babe.)

Rev.—That's right, ma good woman. Ah likes to see de mudders come ter meetin'. Yo' know "De hand dat rocks de cradle rules de world."

Maw—If de han' dat rocks de cradle rules de world, I say "Heah, Sambo, rule de world awhile, I'se tired!" (Hands the child to *Sambo*.) --

Rev.—One ting more, bredren, I would like to speak ob. Ah met a man yesterday who saw two skulls ob de Apostle Paul in Rome, one as a boy, an' de odder as a man. Now I thought, bredren that it might be quite an inspitation to us to hab a skull ob de great apostle in our church. What does de bredren tink? Dis man dat I talked to might procure us one fo' a few dollahs. Could we raise de money? What do you tink, Brudder Rastas?

Rastus—(rising slowly) Ah dunno, Massa preacher, wedder or not we could raise de money. It shuah would be an inspiration to hab one ob de Apostle Paul's skulls heah; but Ah dunno wedder or not we can git de money.

Yo' know Massa Deacon Skinflint am our wealthiest man. He ailays says he has nothin' but praise for his pastor; an' I've noticed as ah takes up de collection dat dat am all he eber does hab. So we can't count on nothin' from Deacon Skinflint.

G. W.—(bursting with laughter, shouts out) Say, Mr. Preacher! How many heads do you suppose dat dere man, Paul, had?

Rev.—Chile, Little folks should be seed an' not heard!

(Maw takes G. W. by the ear and pulls him out of the room, then loud blows can be heard. All look toward door)
(After short pause, she re-enters.)

Rastus—Massa Preacher, hadn't we better let St. Paul's skulls drop, an' pray for de saussy chillen? (Sits down.)

Rev.—Yes, brudder, we'll bring de saussy boy before de Lawd. Ah once heard of a saussy boy who disturbed religious meetings, jist like dat George Washington done. and de next day he fell overboard in mid-ocean and neber was seed again.

Aunt Chloe—Fell overboard in mid-ocean! Do you mean to say, Massa Precaher, dat he was drowned?

Rev.—Oh, no, Aunt Chloe, of course not; but he sprained his ankle quite severely. Anybody else anything to bring before de meetin', or any religious questions to ask?

Rastus—(rising slowly) Brudder Preacher, I've ben wonderin' all week what de millenium am what you talked about las' week? Can yo' mak dat mo' clear?

Rev.—De millenium, massa Rastus! You ben wonderin' what de millenium am? Why, ah shuah is s'prised at yo' ignorance, Rastus. De millenium am about de same as a Methodist centennial, only it am got mo' legs. Anybody else got anything else to ask? (Rastus sits down.)

Sambo—(rising) Massa Preacher.

Rev.—Yes, Sambo, what am it?

Sambo—Ah's often wondered what Noah did all dem forty days he were in de ark? (*Sits down.*)

Rev.—You wants to know what Noah did ter kill de time, I suppose, while he was a-waitin' in de ark? Wal, I tink likely he spen' mo' ob de time a-fishin'.

A. L.—A-fishin' Massa? Didn't de animals go in two by two?

Rev.—Yes, chile, der were two ob every kind of animal.

A. L.—Wal, don't you know Massa, dat he couldn't fish long wid jist two worms?

Rev.—Well, ah reckon de fish didn't bite very good dem days. Anybody else anything ter ask?

Aunt Chloe—De oder day, Massa Preacher, ah heard a man say dat de Lord he done sent volcanoes fer to punish wicked niggahs. Am dat true?

Rev.—De Lawd sent de volcanoes? No, 'mah good woman, de Lawd does not send de volcanoes. Don't you know a man dey calls John D. Rockefellah send de volcanoes?

Aunt Chloe—John D. Rockefellah send de volcanoes? How in de world can dat man send de volcanoes?

Rev.—Wal, you see it's dis way. De good Lawd he made de earth to swing around on two poles, and de Lawd he puts lots ob oil in de middle ob de earth to grease de poles. But dat man dey calls John D. Rockefellah he gone an' took out mos' ob de oil, so dat when de earth turns 'round so fas' de pole in de middle am too hot, and gits afire, den we hab a volcano.

Aunt Chloe—Well, I tink de Lord ought ter punish dat man.

Rev.—Anybody else any troubles dat dey would like advice on? Anything ter bring before de Lord?

Sambo—(*slowly rising*) Massa preacher, you ask if anybody's got any troubles. Ah got a heap o' trouble. But you know de good Lawd couldn't help me none.

Rev.—Why, Mr. Sambo Jeremiah Gittem, you got a lot ob trouble? What can it be? Jist tell it heah to de Lord, an' ah know he'll help yer.

Sambo—(*sadly*) No, Massa Preacher, it's trouble wid mah wife. De good Lawd don't know mah wife.

Rev.—But, massa, I'm a specialist in family matters —ah got fourteen chillens.

Sambo—Well, Massa Preacher, yo' see it's dis way. Mah wife she be a constantly boddering me fer money, all de time. One day it's five cents she asks for, den it's a dime, yesterday she wanted a quarter, an' today it was fifty cents. She's jist a boddering me fer money all de time.

Rev.—Why, Sambo, dat surely am awful. We must certainly bring her befo' de Lawd. What in de world does she do wid all dat money?

Sambo—Do wid all dat money? Why, man, I ain't nebber give her none yet.

Rev.—Well, if you's a good providah, you don't need to give her no money.

Sambo—A good providah, Massa! Ah shuah am; but mah wife she's powerful skeered I'll git catched at it.

Rastus—Massa Preacher. When Ah gits married, me an' mah wife isn't goin' to hab no quarrels.

Rev.—Dat's right massa Rastus. I wish you would git married. Why I heard de other day dat in Porto Rico you could buy a wife fo' five dollahs.

Rastus—Five dollahs, massa preacher! Why, man, if a nigger's got five dollahs he don't need no wife.

(*All laugh.*)

Rev.—Let me remind you, Brudder Sambo, dat when a man marries he takes his wife for bettah or for worse.

Sambo—You say massa that a man takes his wife for bettah or fo' worse. Ah took mah wife for bettah, but she am a lot worse than ah took her for.

Rev.—Now, bredren, we'd better pray for de sick. Can some one tell me who am sick dis week?

Aunt Chloe—You wants to know who's sick dis week. Ah thinks Maria Jane Wilmington is purty sick.

Rev.—Maria Jane Wilmington! Why, ah buried her yesterday.

Aunt Chloe—Lawsy me! Buried Maria Jane Wilmington! Is she dead?

Rev.—Is she dead? I reckon dat's why we buried her.

(*A. L. and G. W. snicker, then laugh aloud.*)

Rev.—Don't you know chillens, dat you shouldn't laugh in meetin'?

A. L.—Well, massa. We was jist smilin' and de smile bust.

Sambo—Ah 'pologize fer dem chillens bein' heah. Ah sent 'em to bed, but dey didn't stay sent.

Rev.—Dis week ah married two ob our good people, and do you know de bride asked to hab de word "Obey" left out ob de ceremony. Now, what do you tink ob dat, bredren?

Aunt Chloe—Hab de word "Obey" left out ob de marriage ceremond? No, brudder preacher, ah wouldn't offend de good Lord by havin' de word "Obey" limited from de marriage ceremony, but ah shuah would hab it limited from de marriage, itself.

Maw—(*loudly*) Amen!

Rev.—Now if dere's no mo' questions—

A. L.—Massa Preacher. Do you suppose Saint Peter was a niggah?

Rastus—Was Saint Peter a niggah? Naw, chile, Peter wern't no niggah.

A. L.—How you know Peter weren't no niggah?

Rastus—'Cause, if Peter had been a niggah, dat rooster neber would hab had a chance to crow three times.

Rev.—Dat reminds me bredren, dere is one ting mo' dat ah wants to speak about. Ah understand dat some of our bredren hab been fallin' by de wayside wid chicken

stealin'. (*All move uneasily on chairs.*) Now, before we take de collection ah wish ter say dat we don't want no tainted money. If any ob de bredren hab been fallin' by de wayside, let him put in no money. De Lawd cannot use tainted money. Now, Brudder Rastus, you take de collection, whilst ah watch for de fallen bredren. (*Rastus gets collection plate, passes it to all, but not a cent is placed therein. Takes empty plate, to preacher, who holds it up, looking at it with open mouth.*) Ah beg yo' pardon, bredren. Possibly ah spoke too hastily. Ah do withdraw mah remarks. De collection will be taken again. (*Rastus again passes plate, and all happily contribute.*) Now, bredren, let us close by singin' a good ol' niggah song. (*All rise and sing, then pass out. Rev. calls after them.*) Don't forget ter bring de trespasses befo' de Lord. (*Rev. picks up books, and passes out.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III.

Stage Set.—Sambo's home the next morning. Maw getting breakfast. Abraham Lincoln whittling a stick; Geo. Washington throwing a ball up and down.

G. W.—Maw, do you know what ah wish?

Maw—Fer land's sake, no! George Washington Gittem, yer allays a-wantin' something. What is yo' wish, now?

G. W.—Ah got a good wish now, Maw.

Maw—Wal, what is it, chile?

G. W.—Don't yer tink it would pay us ter keep a calf?

Maw—Lawsy me! What fer would we keep a calf?

G. W.—'Cause Nitie's comin' home today, an' after she bin a whole yeah at de mission school, she'll want something bettah to eat dan we git fer breakfast.

Maw—(*grabbing off slipper*) George Washington, ah'll whip yer till yer white if ah heah another complaint.

about what ah gib yer to eat. Besides, George Washington, ah don't want yer callin' yer sister "Nitie." Lawsy me! She is Florence Nightingale Gittem, de daughter ob Samuel Jeremiah Gittem. Anyway what would our keepin' a calf hab ter do wid better eatin'?

G. W.—'Cause, Maw, don't yer see if we keep a calf, we could hab liver every mornin' fer breakfast.

A. L.—Goody, Maw, let's git a calf.

Maw—Lawsy me, chillen! What heads you got. But ah can't git no calf. Yer paw don't gib me no money. (*Aside.*) Florence Nightingale might like liver. (*Smiling.*) Ah'll ask Sambo if he can't git us a calf. But, lawsy me! Sambo would be more apt to git catched at gittin' a calf dan at gittin' chickens.

A. L.—Ah, maw, yer powerful skeered. Didn't Paw say de Lord would look after him?

Maw—Yes, Abraham Lincoln. No Gittem has ebber been catched yet. De good Lord does look after his own. (*Looks out window. Joyously.*) Oh, here comes yer paw and Florence Nightingale. Hurry, boys, and git yer hair straightened. (*Blows nose on apron; boys each run hands through their hair.* *G. W. starts to door.* *Maw picks up baby.*)

A. L.—Heah, George Washington; don't yer know yer got one hair crooked? (*G. W. grabs A. L. by hair.*)

G. W.—Don't yer know yer got yer hair crooked? (*A. L. struggles to get away. Voices and laughter heard outside.*)

Maw—Lawsy me, chillen, none ob—(*Door opens.* Nitie, nicely dressed in Northern style. Hat and gloves on, carrying a ukelele case, and is followed by Sambo, carrying a suit case. Florence and Maw rush into each other's arms, kiss and name each other. Florence next takes baby in arms, kisses and tosses baby in air.)

F. N.—Oh, Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane, how you've grown. You dear honey. (*Hands baby to mother, and turns to boys.*) George Washington, I'd scarcely know you. (*Extends hands and attempts to kiss G. W., who gives hand but jerks head away to avoid kiss.*)

G. W.—Aw, now, Nitie! Ah'm nearly a man. Kith-in' is jist fer babies and women.

F. N.—(*laughing merrily.*) Abraham Lincoln, you'll give me a kiss, won't you? (*Shakes hands with A. L. and imprints kisses on both cheeks.*)

A. L.—Shuah, Nitie, ah likes ter kiss de girls. (*Rubs kisses off cheeks.*)

Maw—Take off yer hat, Florence Nightingale, an' git ready for breakfast. (*Mother gives babe to Sambo, and continues to set table.*) *F. N.* takes off hat and glores. *A. L.* and *G. W.* busn themselves about the ukelele case.) Is yer very tired, honey?

F. N.—Yes, Maw, powerful tired. I'd like to know why they put the depot so far from town.

Sambo—Why did dey put de depot so far from town, chile? Ah suppose dey done dat so as to hab de depot as near as dey could to de railroad.

F. N.—Why, sure, paw. I was stupid not to think of that.

Maw—(*standing with arms akimbo, looking F. N. up and down.*) Lawsy me! Wherfor did yer git all dem fine clothes, Florence Nightingale?

F. N.—I made them myself maw, at the mission school.

Maw—You made 'em? Why, lawsy me! Florence Nightingale Gittem! Who teached you how ter make dresses?

F. N.—I learned that at school, mother. They teach all the girls to sew. I'm going to make some new clothes for you, and Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane. (*Opens suit case.*)

Maw—(*going over to baby and petting cheeks*) Poor little pickaninny! My little Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane! If you don't git better soon you won't need no clothes.

F. N.—What! Maw is Mary Ann Elizabeth Jane sick? What's the matter? (*Goes over and takes baby in her arms.*) She does look white.

Maw—Oh, her stomach's wrong. She can't eat nothing.

F. N.—They taught us at the mission school how to care for children. If her stomach's wrong, she ought to diet.

Sambo—If her stomach's wrong she ought ter dye it! Now, what color would yer dye it?

F. N.—Oh, Paw, I don't mean that kind of dye. I mean diet—D-I-E-T—change the food. They told us that if a baby does not thrive on fresh milk, it should be boiled.

Maw—Lawsy me, chile! You say if de baby does not thrive on fresh milk it should be boiled? Are yer plumb gone crazy? Don't yer know that boiling would kill de baby. (*All laugh.*)

F. N.—Aw, mother, let's have breakfast. (*Puts baby in its box, starts to table. Whistling is heard outside.*)

Sambo—Heah comes Rastus, Nightie. He asked me last night if he could marry you.

Maw—Git out o' the room boys. Sambo, git some wood. (*Sambo and A. L. move out. G. W. crawls under couch unnoticed by others. Rap is heard at the door and Maw opens it.*) Come in.

(Enter Rastus grinning, and goes straight to *F. N.* with out-stretched arms. *F. N.* steps back and coldly reaches him the tips of her fingers. *Maw* carries baby out, furtively watching Rastus as she goes.)

Rastus—Nitie, ma Nitie, ah's powerful glad to see yer back.

F. N.—(turning back to *Rastus*.) Well, if you're so powerful glad to see my back, look at it then.

Rastus—Nitie, mah Nitie, talk to me, Nitie. Ah loves you so's ah can't stand it no longer.

F. N.—Well, sit, then, if you can't stand it. (*F. N. sits down on couch. Rastus sits beside her. F. N. gets up and moves to other chair.*)

Rastus—If you would only give me the least hope, ah would—

F. N.—(interrupting) Gracious! I've given you the least hope I ever gave any man.

Maw—(appearing at door, grinning) What are you two chillens talkin' about?

F. N.—Oh--we--we--we're talking about our kith and kin.

G. W.—(crawling out from under couch) Yes, maw, dey was talkin' about their kith and kin. Rastus he said may I kith you, an' Nitie she said, "You kin." (All laugh.)

F. N.—(getting up) George Washington Gittem. If it wasn't for one thing you would be a clever boy.

G. W.—An' what's dat one ting, Nitie, dat keeps me from bein' a clever boy?

F. N.—The one thing that keeps you from being a clever boy is your brain.

G. W.—Mah brain! Maw allays said, ah hadn't none.

Maw—He's jist like his paw.

F. N.—Rastus, would you not like to go for a nice, long walk?

Rastus—(jumping up and grinning happily) Ah shuah would love to. (Reaches for hat.)

F. N.—Well, if you'd love to go for a nice, long walk, don't let me detain you.

(*Rastus* opens mouth in astonishment. Sinks on the couch.)

Rastus—But—but—Nitie, ah thought you was a-comin' wid me.

G. W.—We can't let Nitie go, now. We want her to tell us eberyting.

F. N.—To tell you everything. Why, George Washington! But, really, I don't know everything.

Rastus—(Shaking his head sadly.) Ah'm powerful skeered Nitie knows too much fer poor ol' Rastus.

Maw—(*taking G. W. by the ear, and marching him out of the room.*) Can't yer see Rastus wants ter propose?

Rastus—Nitie, ah must hab an answer. Don't you lub me no moah? What's de mattah wid poor ol' Rastus?

F. N.—Oh, Rastus! Everything's the matter with you. You don't know beans.

Rastus—Don' know beans! Shuah ah do. Ah saw a whole pail ob 'em at de store today.

F. N.—(*smiling*) Oh, Rastus, I can't name all your faults. You smoke too much. If the Lord had meant you to smoke, Rastus, He would have put a chimney on the top of your head. The boys at the mission school do not smoke.

Rastus—Ah smoke too much! No, Nitie, ah doan smoke no moah. Dey ain't no pleasure in it now.

F. N.—You don't smoke any more! What a transformation! I thought you and your pipe were inseparable. Why don't you smoke any more, Rastus?

Rastus—Why doan ah smoke no more? Ah doan smoke no mo' because ah doan git no pleasure out ob it, now.

F. N.—Why don't you get any pleasure out of it, now?

Rastus—Wal yo' see it's dis way, Nitie. It's too expensive to use mah own tobacco, and when ah use somebody else's tobacco, de pipe it am so full it don't draw.

F. N.—(*laughs*) That's just the trouble, Rastus. You have no independence. You don't work.

Rastus—Ah won't work? Why, Nitie, ah don't hab ter work. Ah knows all de chicken roosts 'roun' heah.

F. N.—Oh, Rastus, don't you know it's wicked to steal chickens?

Rastus—Wicked to steal chickens! No, no, it am only wicked if you git catched; an' ah nebber git catched.

F. N.—(*getting up and going to suit case*) I will eat no more stolen chicken. Every man should work for his living. You're just like your ancestors, Rastus.

Rastus—Ancestors! What's dem?

F. N.—Why ancestors are the people you spring from.

Rastus—(*jumping up*) The people ah spring from? Nitie, ah want's yer to know ah don't nebber spring from nobody. Ah allays springs at 'em.

F. N.—Oh, *Rastus*, you're hopeless.

Rastus—Las, night ah thought ah might do some springin' at somebody. Ah was shuah somebody was a-follerin' me, so ah walked backwards all de way home.

F. N.—But, what good did it do to walk backwards all the way home?

Rastus—Don't you see, Nitie? If ah walked backwards ah could see if anybody was a-follerin' me.

(*Crying and whacks are heard outside. A. L. comes in sobbing, holding hands on seat of pants.*)

F. N.—(*placing hand on his shoulder*) Why, Abraham Lincoln, what are you crying about? (*A. L. sobs.*) Whatever is the trouble?

A. L.—(*sobbing*) Paw, he cut his boot wid de ax, when he was choppin' de chicken's head off.

F. N.—Paw cut his boot? Well, child, if it was only the boot, why didn't you laugh instead of cry?

A. L.—Ah did laugh. Dat was de trouble! (*Wriggles out rubbing pants with both hands.*)

(*F. N. and Rastus both laugh. F. N. goes to ukelele case and takes out ukelele.*)

Rastus—What you got dere, Nitie?

F. N.—A ukelele.

Rastus—Let me hab it, dear. (*Rastus takes it, and playing very softly, sings a tender love song. Hands back ukelele and picks up hat.*) Wal, Nitie, Ah guess poor ol' *Rastus* better be gwine. (*Sadly.*) Think it over, Nitie, dear. What can ah do to be worthy ob you? (*Goes toward door, shaking head sadly. F. N. follows.*) Don't boddere showin' me to de doah, Nitie.

F. N.—Oh, it's no trouble to show you to the door, Rastus. I assure you it's a pleasure. (*F. N. turns, looking thoughtful.*) (*Sadly.*) Poor Rastus. I used to like him. He was a good, kind boy. But, oh, things seem so different. He seems so ignorant and uncouth. So different from the boys at the mission school. The boys at the school are learning good trades. And are learning how to farm successfully. They know it's wrong to steal chickens. If Rastus were only like those boys. (*Pauses awhile. Face brightens.*) I know. I'll coax Rastus to go to the mission school. I am sure they could make a fine man of him.

(Enter Sambo, carrying one living chicken.)

Sambo—Where's yer maw, Nitie? Ah got one chicken killed, an' ah wants ter see if she wants both ob 'em fo' dinnah.

F. N.—Why, Paw! Two chickens! Where did you get them?

Sambo—Speak low, chile, speak low. You knows yo' paw of old, daughtah. Ah allays was a good providah.

F. N.—But, paw, I cannot eat stolen chickens. Don't you know it's wrong to steal?

Sambo—Wrong to steal! No, Nitie, it's not wrong to steal if you don't git catched.

F. N.—But, paw, it is wrong whether you're caught or not. It's breaking one of the commandments.

Sambo—But, Nitie, ah allays steals from a white man. De good Lord don't mind us stealin' from de white trash. Nitie, ah promised yer maw when ah married her dat ah would git her a chicken ebery week, an' so far, we'se had chicken fer dinnah ebery Sunday, 'cept one, and dat Sunday we had turkey. Aw, Nitie, de Lord has been good ter me. Ah's nebber bin catched once.

F. N.—(*going to Sambo and putting her hand on his arm.*) Oh, paw, I do wish I could get you to see it's wicked.

Sambo—(*stepping back amazed.*) Me, wicked, Nitie? How can you say dat? Don't yo' know ah goes to prayer meetin' ebery week? No, daughtah, ah's one ob de Lord's own. Ah can make longer an' louder prayers dan any niggah at de meetin's. De good Lord has allays blessed ol' Sambo. No man as can make as long prayers as ah can, can eber be called wicked.

F. N.—With us, the whites are as trash, but the Lord, He makes no difference. With Him it is just as bad to take from a white as from a black. Besides, the good book says we must earn our living by the sweat of our brow.

Sambo—Why, daughtah, if you had seen me sweat las' night, when Mr. Vincent come in heah lookin' fer his chickens, you'd know dat ah earns mah livin' by de sweat ob mah brow.

F. N.—Yes, paw, but that was not work. (*Paats her hand on his arm, pleadingly.*) Paw, I cannot and will not eat stolen chicken. Let us work for our living. (*Face brightens.*) I'll work with you. Let's all work. (*Jumping up and down with glee.*) Look at all those ten acres of waste land behind our house. If that was properly worked we could all live well, and honestly. Oh! (*Clapping hands with glee.*) What fun! We could all dress respectably, and have a decent house. Think of it, paw.

Sambo—Work! (*Lets chicken fall on floor.*) Aw, Florence Nightingale! Dat word, work, sounds all right fer some. But doan yer know dat work an' yer paw doan agree.

F. N.—(*Laughs.*) But, paw, it will when I work with you, and Abraham Lincoln and George Washington work, too. How independent we'll all feel. Let's try it, paw. Please do. Just try it.

Sambo—(*somewhat sadly*) All right, Nitie; you could allays manage your poor ol' father. But, what'll we do fo' dinnah, if ah takes dese chickens back?

F. N.—Don't worry about dinner. I learned how to make lots of good things while at the school. And are

you really going to take the chickens back? You darling, darling, darling father! Oh, I'm so happy. *(Throws arms about Sambo's neck and kisses him.)*

Sambo—*(picking up chicken)* Yes, chile, I'll take 'em back. It might please de Lord; and besides, ah tink it might be bettah fo' George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to learn to work. *(Starts toward door with bowed head, then turns around grinning.)* If ah tells Mr. Vincent ah found his chickens, ah might git a reward. *(Goes out.)*

F. N.—Oh! I could shout with joy. *(Dances around the platform, picks up ukulele, and sings a happy, joyous ditty.)* Oh, I must be helping maw. *(Dances out.)*

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